

INGROWN TOENAIL

What is an ingrown toenail?

An ingrown toenail is a toenail that grows into the surrounding skin or tissue of the toe. The toenail on the big toe is the one that is most commonly ingrown.

How does it occur?

An ingrown toenail usually occurs as a result of improper nail trimming. If a nail is cut curved instead of straight across, it may grow into the flesh at the edge of the nail and become ingrown.

Nails may also become ingrown as a result of direct blows or from wearing shoes or boots that are too tight.

What are the symptoms?

An area around the corners and edges of the toenail is painful. The toe may be swollen and red. There may be drainage. A toe with an ingrown toenail that becomes infected will be red and swollen and will have pus.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine your toe.

How is it treated?

Discomfort may be relieved by soaking your foot in a basin of warm water two or three times a day.

If only a small part of your toenail is ingrown, the corner of the nail can be lifted up with a pair of tweezers and a small piece of cotton placed underneath this part of the nail. Change the piece of cotton every day. Keep the feet clean and dry. Wear clean socks every day and open toed shoes or sandals.

Your healthcare provider may remove all or part of the ingrown nail. He or she will use numbing medicine before doing this. To prevent the nail from becoming ingrown again your provider may put a chemical on the nail growth area or may surgically remove the growth area.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics if your toe is infected.

When can I return to my sport or activity after an ingrown toenail?

You may return to your sport or activity when you no longer have pain in your toe. It is important that your shoes fit well.

How can I prevent an ingrown toenail?

- Trim your toenails straight across without curving the edges.
- Wear shoes that do not cramp your toes.
- Cushion a nail that presses into the skin by putting cotton under the corners and edges that tend to become ingrown.

What is removal of an ingrown toenail?

This is a procedure to remove part or all of a toenail that has grown into the surrounding skin.

When is it used?

Ingrown nails are removed when the toe has become so inflamed or infected that no other treatment will work to cure the problem.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

Your healthcare provider may ask you to stop taking certain medicines before your toenail is removed (aspirin or other blood thinners, for example). Do not stop any medicines without talking to your provider first.

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You may need to plan to take a day or two off from your usual activities after the procedure is done.

What happens during the procedure?

The skin is cleansed with an antibacterial solution or alcohol. A local anesthetic is injected into the toe to numb part or all of the toe. A tourniquet may be put around the base of your toe to decrease bleeding during the procedure. Then your healthcare provider will cut away and remove part or all of the toenail. Afterwards an antibiotic and a bandage are put on the toe. You can go home soon after the nail is removed.

If you have had several ingrown nails in the same toe, your provider may destroy part of the area that the nail grows from. This can be done with a chemical or electrocautery (burning with an electric current). It may help to prevent the nail from becoming ingrown again.

What happens after the procedure?

- If your toe is infected, your provider may prescribe oral antibiotics. Follow your provider's instructions for taking the medicine.
- Rest and elevate your foot for 12 to 24 hours. Ask your provider when you will be able to resume your normal activities.
- Take the pain-relief medicine recommended or prescribed by your provider.
- Keep the bandage on your toe for the first day or two. When you are ready to remove the bandage, soaking your toe in warm water first may make it easier to remove the bandage.

It will take 6 to 9 months for your nail to grow back. After the nail grows back, you can keep from getting another ingrown nail by cutting your nail straight across the top.

Keep your follow-up appointment with your healthcare provider as recommended.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

Your toe hurts because the toenail is growing into it. Removing part of the nail is the only way to make it feel better and cure the problem.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- A local anesthetic may not numb the area enough and you may feel some minor discomfort. Also, in rare cases, you may have an allergic reaction to the anesthetic.
- The toe may become infected.
- Rarely, the nail may not grow back

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Call your provider right away if:

- you have increased redness, swelling, or drainage from the toenail area (these are signs of an infection)
- you develop a fever of 100°F (37.8°C) or higher
- you have bleeding after the procedure that does not stop
- you are having a lot of pain, especially if the pain is getting worse rather than better
- your toe is becoming dark or swollen

Call during office hours if:

- you have questions about the procedure or its result